

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6377

As of January 30, 2018

Title: An act relating to the definition of veteran.

Brief Description: Addressing the definition of veteran.

Sponsors: Senators Warnick, Dhingra, Conway and Van De Wege; by request of LEOFF Plan 2 Retirement Board.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: State Government, Tribal Relations & Elections: 2/02/18.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Includes periods of military service that would qualify for a campaign badge or medal, but was not issued, for purposes of interruptive military service qualifying for the Law Enforcement Officers and Firefighters (LEOFF) 2 retirement system.
- Designates the end of the Persian Gulf War and includes certain specific campaigns within the listed conflicts that qualify as a period of war for LEOFF 2 purposes.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, TRIBAL RELATIONS & ELECTIONS

Staff: Melissa Van Gorkom (786-7491)

Background: Veteran Status. The state provides certain recognition benefits to persons based on their status as a military service veteran. Generally, veteran status is recognized for a service member who received an honorable discharge, or other excusable discharge. Benefits for such general service status include, among others: free license plate decals, admission to state soldiers' and veterans' homes, veterans' scoring preference on civil service exams, veteran homeownership down payment assistance programs, and certain services administered by the state Department of Veterans Affairs.

A separate status is recognized for veterans who served in a period of war or conflict. Such combat veterans are eligible to receive additional benefits, including, but not limited to:

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higher scoring preference on civil service exams, service credit for retirement pension purposes, participation in a designated shared leave pool program, and property tax relief for senior widows of veterans.

Veteran Definition. The definition for a combat veteran includes a veteran who received an honorable discharge, or is actively serving honorably and has either served in a period of war, or received the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal (AFEM) for combat in a foreign territory. The Department of Defense has designated certain conflicts under which service qualifies for the AFEM. In addition to the AFEM, certain conflicts also qualify for specific medals of participation.

A period of war includes World Wars I & II, the Korean conflict, the Vietnam era, the Persian Gulf War, and any future period that includes a congressional declaration of war. A period of war also covers certain armed conflicts where the participant has been awarded a campaign badge or medal. Such conflicts include: the crisis in Lebanon, the invasion of Grenada, Operation Just Cause (Panama), Operation Restore Hope (Somalia), Operation Uphold Democracy (Haiti), Operation Joint Endeavor (Bosnia), Operation Noble Eagle, Operation Enduring Freedom (southern or central Asia), and Operation Iraqi Freedom (Persian Gulf).

Military Service Credit for State Retirement Systems. Federal law requires state retirement systems to provide credit for interruptive military service. Washington's state-sponsored retirement systems provide credit for interruptive military service, for up to five years of service. The employee's contributions are waived if the interruptive service occurred during a period of a war or conflict that qualifies under the state definition for combat veteran status.

The LEOFF 2 retirement system serves qualifying commissioned law enforcement officers and firefighters. In 2017, the Legislature directed the LEOFF Board to study extending the interruptive service credit for employees whose interruptive service occurred during a qualifying period of war or conflict, but who did not receive a campaign badge or medal. Based on the study, the LEOFF 2 Board recommended legislation to amend the qualifying periods of war or conflict within the definition of a combat veteran.

Summary of Bill: Defines veteran for the purpose of the LEOFF 2 retirement system.

For purposes of service during a period of war, the combat definition includes service that would otherwise qualify for a badge or medal, except that the member already received a badge or medal for prior service during the same conflict.

The period or war designated for the end of the Persian Gulf War includes:

- February 28, 1991;
- any later date prescribed by presidential proclamation; or
- any badge or medal issued before November 30, 1995.

Operation Inherent Resolve (Iraq and Syria) and Operation Freedom's Sentinel (Afghanistan) are added to the listed armed conflicts that qualify as a period of war for LEOFF 2 purposes.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.